

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 081258Z AUG 75

FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7259

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 1267

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, PINS, SOCI, IS, JO

SUBJ: IBRAHIMI MOSQUE

REF: AMMAN 5372; JERUSALEM 1246; TEL AVIV 4994

1. AFTER AUG 7 COURTESY CALL ON HEBRON MAYOR SHEIKH JA'ABARI, CONGEN AND POLITICAL OFFICER VISITED IBRAHIMI MOSQUE. BASED ON THIS VISIT AND LONG TALK WITH MOSQUE SHEIKH (CUSTODIAN), IT APPEARS PRESS ACCOUNTS OF PARTITION AND FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN 1967 ARRANGEMENTS REGULATING MOSLEM AND JEWISH SERVICES ARE, TO SAY THE LEAST, EXAGGERATED. ESSENTIALLY MOSLEM CHARACTER OF MOSQUE REMAINS UNCHANGED.

2. AS OF AUG 7, LONG-STANDING MODALITIES FOR HANDLING LARGE NUMBER OF TOURISTS (MAINLY JEWISH), MOSLEM AND JEWISH WORSHIPPERS APPEARED BASICALLY UNALTERED. IN THE TWO LARGER CHAMBERS, CARPETED AREAS RESERVED FOR MOSLEM PRAYERS CONTINUED TO BE ROPED OFF AND SIGNS
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EXCLUDING NON-MOSLEMS FROM ENTERING THE AREAS WERE

PROMINENTLY DISPLAYED AND RESPECTED. NUMEROUS MOSLEMS OBSERVED AT PRAYER. MOSQUE SHEIKH RECOUNTED INSTANCES WHEN HE HAD POLITELY DECLINED REQUESTS FROM ISRAELIS WHICH HE FELT MIGHT CHANGE 1967 ARRANGEMENT (E.G. REQUESTS TO VISIT HIS OFFICE AND MOSQUE'S LIBRARY).

3. AREA DESIGNATED FOR JEWISH SERVICES CONSISTS OF TWO SMALLER ROOMS JOINED BY COURTYARD. MOSQUE SHEIKH ALLEGES JEWS SOMETIME PLACE MOVABLE CHAIRS IN OTHER AREAS OF THE MOSQUE BUT HE DID NOT RPT NOT ALLEGE THAT JEWS INVADE MOSLEM PRAYER AREAS. SHEIKH CONDUCTED CONGEN AND POLOFF ON TOUR OF THESE ROOMS AND THERE WAS NO RPT NO RESTRICTION ON ACCESS BY PUBLIC SINCE SERVICES NOT IN PROGRESS. RIFAI'S AUG7 STATEMENT (FBIS) THAT MOSLEMS PREVENTED FROM ENTERING CERTAIN AREAS OF MOSQUE IS INCORRECT.

4. COMMENT: AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, PRESENT TENSION FOLLOWS PROVOCATIVE ACTS BY BOTH JEWISH AND MOSLEM GROUPS (JERUSALEM 1194 AND 1214). MAIN EFFECT TO DATE OF CHANGES ANNOUNCED BY PERES APPEARS TO BE TO PERMIT JEWS TO STAY IN MOSQUE AT ALL TIMES EXCEPT ON FRIDAY UNTIL AFTER 4. P.M. MOSLEM PRAYERS (JA'ABARI CONFIRMED UNDERSTANDING ON THIS POINT). BASIC MOSLEM ADMINISTRATION OF MOSQUE DOES NOT APPEAR, FOR TIME BEING TO BE CHANGED AND ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES ARE PRESENT TO MAINTAIN ORDER. MOSLEMS SUSPECT, PROBABLY WITH REASON, THAT JEWISH ZEALOTS FROM NEARBY SETTLEMENTS WILL CONTINUE SALAMI TACTICS UNTIL MOSQUE PLACED UNDER GOI ADMINISTRATION. BASIC PROBLEM, OF COURSE, IS THAT ORIGINAL EDIFICE IS HERODIAN FORTRESS BUILT OVER CAVE WHERE TRADITIONALLY ABRAHAM AND HIS FAMILY SAID TO BE ENTOMBED. BYZANTINE BASILICA ADDED MUCH LATER WHICH WAS EVENTUALLY CONVERTED INTO MOSQUE. THUS, JEWS, MOSLEMS AND EVEN CHRISTIANS HAVE HISTORICAL BASES FOR CONSIDERING THIS SITE TO BE OF PARTICULAR RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE. HOPE SOME OF FOREGOING MAY BE USEFUL IN RESPONSE AMMAN'S 5372 (NOTAL).
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